

Of course it's a coup

Miss the obvious, lose your republic



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Imagine if it had gone like this.

Ten Tesla cybertrucks, painted in camouflage colors with a giant X on each roof, drive noisily through Washington DC. Tires screech. Out jump a couple of dozen young men, dressed in red and black Devil's Champion armored costumes. After giving Nazi salutes, they grab guns and run to one government departmental after another, calling out slogans like "all power to Supreme Leader Skibidi Hitler."

Historically, that is what coups looked like. The center of power was a physical place. Occupying it, and driving out the people who held office, was to claim control. So if a cohort of armed men with odd symbols had stormed government buildings, Americans would have recognized that as a coup attempt.

And that sort of coup attempt would have failed.

Now imagine that, instead, the scene goes like this.

A couple dozen young men go from government office to government office, dressed in civilian clothes and armed only with zip drives. Using technical jargon and vague references to orders from on high, they gain access to the basic computer systems of the federal government. Having done so, they proceed to grant their Supreme Leader access to information and the power to start and stop all government payments.

That coup is, in fact, happening. And if we do not recognize it for what it is, it could succeed.

In the third decade of the twenty first century, power is more digital than physical. The buildings and the human beings are there to protect the workings of the computers, and thus the workings of the government as a whole, in our case an (in principle) democratic government which is organized and bounded by a notion of individual rights.

The ongoing actions by Musk and his followers are a coup because the individuals seizing power have no right to it. Elon Musk was elected to no office and there is no office that would give him the authority to do what he is doing. It is all illegal. It is also a coup in its intended effects: to undo democratic practice and violate human rights.

In gaining data about us all, Musk has trampled on any notion of privacy and dignity, as well as on the explicit and implicit agreements made with our government when we pay our taxes or our student loans. And the possession of that data enables blackmail and further crimes.

In gaining the ability to stop payments by the Department of the [Treasury](#), Musk would also make democracy meaningless. We vote for representatives in Congress, who pass laws that determine how our tax money is spent. If Musk has the power to halt this process at the level of payment, he can make laws meaningless. Which means, in turn, that Congress is meaningless, and our votes are meaningless, as is our citizenship.



Resistance to the coup is the defense of the human against the digital and the democratic against the oligarchic. If Musk controls these digital systems, Republican elected officials will be just as helpless as Democratic ones. The institutions that they voted to create can also be “deleted,” as Musk puts it.

President Trump, for that matter, will also perform at Musk’s pleasure. There is not much he can do without the use of the federal government’s computers. No one will explain this to Trump or to his supporters, of course.

A coup is underway, against Americans as possessors of human rights and dignities, and against Americans as citizens of a democratic republic. Each hour this goes unrecognized makes the success of the coup more likely.